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It Takes a Village: Protecting Rural African American Youth in the Context of Racism

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Keywords
African American, adolescents, gender differences, rural, racism, racial socialization, parenting, racial identity, community influences, SEM, focus groups, mixed methods

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Abstract

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Keywords

African American; Adolescents; Gender differences; Rural; Racism; Racial socialization; Parenting; Racial identity; Community influences; SEM; Focus groups; Mixed methods

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Introduction

Racism remains a major challenge confronting African American families and constitutes a primary source of family stress (Murry et al. 2001; Peters and Massey 1983). Personal experience with discrimination has been linked to elevated rates of deviant peer affiliation, violence, anger, and mental health problems in African American adolescents (Brody et al. 2006; Wong et al. 2003). These disparities have stimulated scientific inquiry into the ways in which families contend with the pressures associated with racism (McAdoo 1995; Peters and Massey 1983), with specific emphasis on the protective nature of racial socialization (i.e., parenting practices that teach children to value their race, while alerting them to the bias they will likely face) in preparing African American youth to live in a society that frequently devalues them and their families (Coard et al. 2004). Despite a growing number of studies on racial socialization and youth development, social scientists still know little about the mechanisms and contextual processes that facilitate parenting practices that buffer African American youth from developing antisocial behaviors, including a hostile view of the world, affiliation with deviant peers, and academic underperformance (Ogbu 1986). The current article examines the risk and protective factors associated with discrimination and adolescent outcomes.

While most research on racial discrimination has been conducted in urban areas, these issues may have an even greater impact on families residing in rural contexts. Although rural African American families often reside in neighborhoods with similar concentration of poverty as their urban counterparts, rural families often lack the resources available to urbanites and, consequently, may confront greater challenges in their efforts to overcome the negative consequences of poverty (Kogan et al. 2006). On the other hand, some studies indicate that rural African American families are often nested in cohesive communities that have protective value for parents, and such environments may buffer rural children from engaging in antisocial behavior (Brody et al. 2001). “The village,” as such environments have become widely known, has been recognized as an important concept in understanding resilience of African American families living in a society where they are devalued (McAdoo 2002). This article reports ways in which negative and positive social contextual processes (i.e., racial discrimination and collective socialization) influence parenting and youth outcomes for rural African Americans. The following sections provide the theoretical and empirical foundations underpinning the proposed model of contextual effects on youth development (see Fig. 1).

Racial Discrimination and Racial Socialization as Predictors of Child Outcomes

Although racial discrimination has been linked to negative outcomes, relationships with expected intrapersonal mediators like self-esteem (Rumbaut 1994) and racial identity (Simons et al. 2002) have not been established. As a result, the processes by which discrimination predicts negative outcomes remain unclear. Structural Ecosystems Theory (SET) posits that exosystemic factors trickle down to children through their impact on the adults in children’s lives (Szapocznik and Coatsworth 1999). Thus, following SET, parents’ experiences with discrimination would influence child outcomes, by way of increasing parents’ use of racial socialization strategies.

In this study, we compare two possible pathways for the influence of discrimination. First, we examine the direct influence of discrimination on adolescent self-pride (i.e., racial identity and self-esteem). Second, we propose a meditational relationship through parenting. Specifically, we hypothesize that African American parents who experience discrimination are likely to socialize their children in a way that helps them develop strategies to overcome the potential negative effects of racist events on their subsequent development (Hughes and Chen 1997). Moreover, children are more likely to reject negative stereotypes about their group and develop self-pride when parents convey positive messages about being an African American in

contemporary society (Murry et al. 2007). Consequently, we hypothesize that the link between parents' experiences with discrimination and adolescent self-pride will be mediated through racial socialization.

Collective Socialization and Competence-Promoting Parenting

In addition to negative influences, SET also recognizes positive exosystemic factors that can support adaptive parenting practices. In close-knit rural communities, adults often use strategies to support other parents and monitor neighborhood children, a process referred to as collective socialization (Burton and Jarrett 2000). Collective socialization can encourage positive developmental pathways for children by sanctioning appropriate behavior and correcting misbehavior. When community residents band together in this way, the process of parental monitoring reaches beyond household boundaries and represents a measure of trust and agreement among adults about acceptable conduct for children. Extant studies have shown collective socialization to have long-term protective effects against deviant peer affiliation (Brody et al. 2001) and conduct disorder (Simons et al. 2004). Informed by the SET, we hypothesized that the association between collective socialization and child outcomes would be mediated through parental use of involved, vigilant parenting.

Parenting, the Development of Self-Pride, and Child Outcomes

When African American parents convey messages of acceptance and pride, children are likely to internalize their parents' perceptions in ways that foster a healthy sense of self (Tyson 2002). Both general parenting and racial socialization practices have been associated with self-esteem and racial identity amongst African American adolescents (Murry et al. 2007). Prior work has found that amongst African American youth, self-esteem and racial identity have favorable implications for academic achievement, peer pressure resistance, and risk avoidance (Wong et al. 2003; Zimmerman et al. 1997). Consequently, we examine ways in which general- and racially-specific parenting are associated with adolescent self-pride and associated outcomes.

Moderational Effect of Gender

While all youth are susceptible to discrimination, African American males appear to be at a distinct disadvantage with respect to many of the variables examined in this article. For example, males report lower racial identity and academic achievement (Ford and Harris 1997). In addition, parents tend to monitor their daughters more deliberately than their sons, and adolescent males are more likely to engage in violence than their female counterparts (Rai et al. 2003). Based on these findings, we contend that gender may also moderate the association of racial discrimination on key pathways examined in herein. For instance, discrimination is more closely linked to conduct problems for males than females (Brody et al. 2006). Thus, we examine the function of gender in forecasting the effects of context on general- and racially-specific parenting, adolescent self-pride, and associated outcomes.

The Current Study

Hypotheses and Research Questions

This study investigated linkages between negative and positive contextual influences on intrapersonal mediators and distal outcomes for rural African American adolescents (see Fig. 1). Specifically, we considered the direct effects of discrimination on adolescent self-pride and indirectly through parenting practices. We further considered how parenting and neighborhood context contribute to a positive sense of self, and how that in turn protects against negative responses to racism, including academic underachievement, succumbing to peer pressure, and aggressive tendencies. The possible influence of gender on these relationships was examined

as an empirical question. In addition to the quantitative analyses, we also employed qualitative data to increase the breadth of our understanding of the proposed relationships between contextual influences, self-pride, and associated adolescent outcomes.

Methodological Overview of the Two Studies

The study employed a concurrent triangulation design (Creswell 2003), a mixed-method approach, in which data from different sources are used to cross-validate each other, using a combination of panel and focus group data with African American families living in northeast Georgia. The quantitative data were obtained from the Georgia sub-sample of the Family and Community Health Study, a multisite, multi-wave panel study of neighborhood and family effects on African American parents' and children's health and development. The qualitative data were obtained as a supplement to the Family Processes and the Development of Competence in Rural African American Children Study, a longitudinal panel study of single African American mothers and their adolescent children. To enable comparisons between the qualitative and quantitative data, we selected panel data only from those families residing in Georgia for analysis. Respondents in the two data sets resided in the same counties. We compared the samples on several key demographic characteristics (see Table 1) and concluded that the samples were adequately similar for the purpose of the proposed analyses. In the sections that follow, we first present the methods and results of the quantitative study, followed by the methods and results for the qualitative study. Finally, the discussion integrates findings from the two studies.

Study 1: A Theoretical Model of Risk and Protective Factors

Quantitative Data Participants and Methods

For Study 1, we analyzed data from FACHS, a panel study of family and community influences on health and development of rural African American families. As previously stated, to ensure that participants in the quantitative and the qualitative samples would be comparable, we limited the analyses to those families residing in Georgia. The Georgia subsample included 373 families with a child who was 10-or 11-years old when recruited. Data were collected from the targeted child, siblings, primary caregivers, and co-caregivers, if applicable.

Many steps were taken to ensure cultural sensitivity and trust with participants. First, measures were selected based on demonstrated strong psychometric properties and predictive validity in previous research with African American children and adults (Brody et al. 2001). Next, before data collection began, eight focus groups examined and critiqued the instruments. Each group was composed of 10 African American mothers who lived in neighborhoods similar to, and were of comparable economic and educational background with, the main study participants. Group members suggested modifications of items that were perceived to be culturally insensitive, intrusive, or unclear. After the focus groups' revisions were incorporated into the instruments, the protocol was piloted tested with new 16 families, 8 from each state. Researchers took extensive notes on the pilot test participants' reactions to the questionnaires and offered suggestions for further changes.

To enhance trust and rapport between field interviewers and study participants, all field interviewers were African American university students or community members, and had completed 1 month of training on administering computer-based, self-report questionnaires. Field interviewers interviewed study participants via laptop computers in families' homes on two occasions. The interviews took place within a week of one another and lasted approximately 2 h. Participants completed computer-based self-report questionnaires by selecting responses on a keypad. Though each question was displayed on a computer screen, in view of both the participant and the interviewer, the field interviewers read each item aloud

for participants because literacy was a concern. To ensure confidentiality, the interviews were conducted privately with no other family members present to overhear the conversation.

Quantitative Measures

Racial Discrimination—Parents' and adolescents' experiences with discrimination were measured with the Schedule of Racist Events scale (Landrine and Klonoff 1996; 13 items; α = .92 for parents, .87 for adolescents). A sample item is, "How often have you encountered Whites who are surprised that you as an African American person did something really well?" The rating scale ranged from 1 (never) to 4 (frequently).

Racial Socialization—Racial socialization practices were assessed using parents' report on two Racial Socialization (Hughes and Johnson 2001) subscales: *Black Pride* (5 items, α = .90) and *Preparation for Bias* (6 items, α = .89). Sample items were "How often have you talked with your child about important people or events in the history of their racial group?" and "How often have you told your child that people might try to limit them because of their race?" The rating scale ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (10 or more times).

Collective Socialization—Collective Socialization was assessed based on parents' reports of the Collective Socialization scale (Sampson et al. 1997; 8 items; α = .72). A sample item is, "You can count on adults in your neighborhood to watch out that children are safe and don't get into trouble." Response choices were either true/false or Likert-type responses ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 4 (very likely).

Involved, Vigilant Parenting—Involved, vigilant parenting was assessed using four parent subscales developed by Loeber et al. (1996). *Parental Monitoring* (10 items; α = .73) included, "How often do you know what your child does after school?" *Consistent Discipline* (10 items; α = .49) included, "When you discipline your child, how often does the type of discipline you use depend on your mood?" *Inductive Reasoning* (10 items; α = .76) included, "How often do you give reasons to your child for you decisions?" *Problem Solving* (7 items; α = .51) included: "When you and your child have a problem, how often can the two of you figure out how to deal with it?" Possible responses for the subscales ranged from 1 (never) to 4 (always). The low reliability estimates on two of these general parenting measures are especially striking compared to the high estimates on the more racially-specific indicators. It may be that future studies need to assess the extent to which there is invariance on assessments of involved, vigilant parenting between African American and other families. However, all measures in the quantitative study were subjected to extensive review with representatives of the communities to ensure that they were culturally appropriate.

Self-Pride—Adolescent self-pride was assessed using adolescents' reports of two indicators, *Racial Identity* and *Self Image*. Adolescents rated their positive racial identity via the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (Sellers et al. 1997; 21 items; α = .76). A sample item is, "I like living in a Black neighborhood." Possible responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Adolescents rated their positive self image via the Self Prototype subscale of the Prototype Perception Scale (Gibbons and Gerrard 1995; 6 items; α = .57). A sample item is, "How good-looking are you?" Possible responses ranged from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very). For self image, the relatively low α is somewhat predictable as it assesses a variety of positive attributes, providing a multifaceted view of self-image.

Peer Pressure Resistance—Peer Pressure Resistance was developed specifically for the FACHS study (Simons et al. 2003; 8 items; α = .96) to examine the extent to which adolescents felt that they could avoid doing negative things that friends tried to coerce them to do. A sample

item is, “How well can you resist pressure from your friends to shoplift?” Possible responses ranged from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very well).

Legitimacy of Aggression—The Legitimacy of Aggression scale (Simons et al. 2003; 7 items; $\alpha = .79$) measured the extent to which adolescents felt that aggressive behavior was an effective solution to problems that they may encounter. A sample item is, “People will take advantage of you if you don’t let them know how tough you are,” Possible responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

Academic Achievement—Academic Achievement was measured via adolescents’ reports about their success in school (Elliot et al. 1985; 4 items; $\alpha = .73$). A sample item was, “You do well in school, even in hard subjects.” Possible responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

Quantitative Data Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations for all study variables are presented in Table 2. The hypothesized model (see Fig. 1) was analyzed using SEM with the maximum likelihood estimation procedures available in AMOS 5 (Arbuckle 2003). Adolescent experience of discrimination was not related to their racial identity and was positively associated with self image. Moreover, adolescents’ reports of discrimination did not predict self-pride when entered in the model. Removing this variable from the model substantially improved model fit. Figure 2 presents the final model. The χ^2 for the fitted model was 102.40 with 63 degrees of freedom ($p \leq .01$). Because of the relatively large sample size in this study, the χ^2 may potentially be inflated. Therefore, we turned to other alternative fit indices which indicate that current model provided acceptable fit to the data. A χ^2/df ratio between 1 and 3 indicates a good model fit (Arbuckle and Wothke 1999); the χ^2/df ratio for this analysis was 1.62. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.04 with 90 percent confidence interval: 0.03 and 0.06. Both the value of RMSEA and the confidence interval are below 0.06, indicating a good fit (Hu and Bentler 1999).

Additionally, all loadings (λs) of manifest indicators on corresponding latent constructs were significant at $\alpha = .01$ and all the coefficients were above 0.30, indicating adequacy of measurement. The structural coefficients (standardized βs) represent the tests of the study hypotheses about the relations among the theoretical constructs (see Fig. 2). As hypothesized, primary caregivers’ racial discrimination of evoked greater use of racial socialization, which in turn positively contributed to youth self-pride. In an alternative model (not shown here), the direct link between racial discrimination and youth self-pride was not significant ($\beta = -.06$, $p > .05$). The Sobel test (Preacher and Hayes 2004) of the indirect effect of racial discrimination on youth self-pride was significant ($z = 2.66$, $p < .05$). The significant indirect effect indicates that the relationship between racial discrimination and youth self-pride filtered through the primary caregivers’ use of racial socialization.

Living in a neighborhood characterized by high collective socialization had positive influence on parents’ engagement in involved, vigilant parenting. This provides support for the hypothesis that supportive environments may reinforce parents’ exertion of higher regulative (monitoring and consistent discipline) and nurturing behaviors (problem solving and inductive reasoning) with their children. Parenting, in turn, promoted youth self-pride, as the link between involved, vigilant parenting and youth self-pride was also significant. In an alternative model (not shown here), the direct link between collective socialization and youth self-pride was not significant ($\beta = -.09$, $p > .05$). The result of Sobel test was also supported the significance of indirect link between collective socialization on youth self-pride ($z = 2.62$, $p < .05$). This indicated the mediating role of parenting.

Youth self-pride was significantly related to the various adolescent outcomes as hypothesized. Self-pride increased adolescents' ability to resist peer pressure and their academic achievement, while it decreased adolescents' perception of the legitimacy of aggression. To test the mediating role of youth self-pride, we added direct links between two parenting practices and the outcomes. Except for the link between racial socialization and legitimacy of aggression, all the other paths were not significant at $\alpha = .05$. Instead, all the Sobel tests of indirect effects between two parenting practices and the outcomes were significant at $\alpha = .05$, supporting the important mediational role of youth self-pride for youth outcomes.

We also tested the possible gender differences for the paths in the model using multiple group comparison in SEM. First, we ran the model freeing all the paths in the model across genders. Then we constrained the tested paths as equal across genders one at a time. The test of the χ^2 difference (with one degree of freedom) between two models helps us to determine the significant difference of the path across genders. The results indicated no significant gender differences for all the paths in the model. In sum, the results supported pathways of influence from contextual factors to parenting to adolescent outcomes. As hypothesized, contextual factors influenced adolescent outcomes through family processes and adolescent self-pride.

Study 2: Qualitative Investigation of Racial Discrimination, Socialization and Identity

Focus Group Methods

To increase the overall depth of understanding of the development and protective influence of positive racial identity amongst African American adolescents and to explore the lack of an association between youth experiences of discrimination and identity, we analyzed focus group data collected as a supplement to the Family Processes and the Development of Competence in Rural African American Children study. Twelve focus groups were conducted with mothers of adolescent children aged 12–18, and their adolescent sons and daughters. In total, 31 mothers, 28 daughters, and 29 sons participated.

Many steps were taken to support reliability and trustworthiness of the data and findings. All focus group facilitators participated in one training session. In these training sessions, standardized procedures for conducting the groups and asking the participants questions were reviewed. Focus group facilitators were matched on race and gender and they used semi-structured interview guides to guide their line of questioning. In using these guides as protocols, we were able to assure reliability of data collection across groups. The facilitators asked the mothers and adolescents if they believed that society treated them differently because of their race and gender. Facilitators asked mothers how they felt their beliefs about race impacted their parenting practices. Similarly, adolescent children were encouraged to discuss their perceptions about the influence of their mothers' beliefs about racism on her parenting.

The 1-h focus groups were video- and audio-recorded. We examined all transcripts from audio recordings of mothers', sons', and daughters' focus groups to confirm that the semi-structured interview guides were followed. We focused our thematic analysis on data relevant to racial discrimination, socialization, and identity. In this process, we developed a list of themes and patterns based on data observations that pertained to racial discrimination, socialization, and identity (Creswell 1998). We then sorted the text, grouped the data, classified the data into categories or themes, and later compared and contrasted the resulting themes and patterns across gender. Finally, we ensured reliability by seeking feedback about these themes from research personnel who interacted with study participants in the field to refine and confirm our analyses (Creswell 1998). In the next section, we outline our findings on racial discrimination, socialization, and identity.

Focus Group Results

Adolescent Experiences of Racial Discrimination—Adolescents reported that they were not directly affected by racial discrimination, but rather that it influenced them through their parents' experiences. The adolescent female groups indicated that, while African Americans were likely to be discriminated against, especially those with darker skin, and that racism was a greater challenge than sexism, they felt protected from racial discrimination because of their age, and noted that adults were more likely to experience such inequalities on a regular basis. Despite this sense of protection, male and female adolescents recounted many experiences that could be considered discriminatory in the domains of school discipline, academics, social networks, and the police. In the next sections, we describe the findings related to each of these contexts, giving specific attention to the influence on self-pride and highlighting gender differences when applicable.

School Discipline: Both adolescent males and females spoke about how discriminatory experiences in school and the larger community socialized them about being African American, and in turn, affected their self-pride. School is an important context for adolescent development, arguably second only to the home environment. African American adolescent females wrestled with making sense of observed differences in school officials' expectations and disciplinary practices. They noted that White students were commonly granted more privileges, allowed more leniency with dress codes, given more credibility in resolving conflict, and disciplined less harshly, if at all. African American adolescent males corroborated these points. One adolescent male said this:

> Like somebody do something, and then—and then she'll [the teacher] think like I threw something, but I didn't, and she'll think I did it, and then I tell her I didn't do it and she'll still write me up.

Another male shared the following:

> It [school] seems White-owned. That's what everybody says back in school, you know. White person get to the office. I don't ever see them [White students] get suspended… We can go to the office for the same thing and we'll get punished for it.

Academics: African American adolescent males also felt they faced many challenges in their ability to excel academically because of teacher attitudes towards them. They stated that they were less likely to be engaged in the classroom or called on by their teachers and quickly noted that they were viewed as being subordinate to White students, as many underestimated their abilities and their intelligence. Their perceptions of being treated less well at school led the adolescents to feel undervalued. One county in which focus group participants attended predominantly African American schools represented the only instance where these patterns were not observed.

In spite of the racial inequalities that they observed at school, African American females were very proud of their heritage and reported drawing strength from their ancestors' struggles. Given the advances of African Americans and how much had to be overcome to achieve basic civil rights, some females viewed themselves as being superior to White Americans, who they perceived as enjoying privilege without having to rise above inequality.

Social networks: African American adolescents also struggled to make sense of paradoxical interactions in their social networks. They noted how their friends affiliated with peers and stated that White girls viewed African American males and females differently. One female shared,

> I don't get why like my friend like Ashley, she can be friends with a Black girl, but she can't go with a Black boy. She can't talk to a Black boy but she can talk to a Black girl. I don't know why that is. That's you know, I'm saying, I been trying to figure out.

Adolescents were also keenly aware of how other parents socialized their children about race and warned against interacting with African Americans. As one adolescent female said of her White friend, "She got Black boyfriends but she don't want her Mom and Dad to know that."

The Police: In addition to problems at school and with peers, African American adolescent males who participated in the focus groups also reported negative interactions with law enforcement. These young African American males recalled numerous stories about being stopped or detained by the police while traveling by foot on the street or riding in the car. One young adolescent male recalled an encounter with the police when he was out with four friends,

> The police used to stop me when I'd be five deep, you know, what I'm saying … Yeah, but I don't ride like that anymore.

Another male corroborated his point saying,

> One day they just stopped me, now I was riding around and all of a sudden they just jumped behind me and stopped me and they said that the reason they stopped me because somebody tell them that I didn't have no license. But I had it. I believe they just—That was just an excuse, just to stop me.

To be sure, males expressed their frustration with police officers' constant monitoring in their communities and commented on their inability to go about their daily routines without being stopped by law enforcement. Another adolescent male stated, "It makes it hard growing up because the police just ride around, ride around."

Some males said that they were targeted by the police and accused of delinquent acts simply because of their affiliations with delinquent teens. In failing to take heed of their mothers' warnings to avoid affiliating with a deviant peer group, they were caught being in the wrong place at the wrong time and deemed guilty by association. Other males admitted to committing the crimes (e.g., arson, fighting) of which they were accused. They explained their delinquency as not having any other constructive way to express their bottled up anger and frustration about life's circumstances. Residing in a neighborhood where police surveillance was routine, these adolescent males were often caught and prosecuted. Some had served probation while others spent time in a local juvenile hall.

Proactive Racial Socialization

We conceptualized adaptive racial socialization as a form of parenting that prepares children for discrimination, while at the same time highlighting the strengths of African American culture and community (Stevenson 1994). This form of socialization has been demonstrated to have positive implications for youth development (Murry et al. 2007). Mothers used proactive racial socialization strategies (Hughes 2003) in the sense that they warned their children about the bias they might face in school, but emphasized the importance of overcoming these challenges. Unlike the quantitative results, findings from the focus group analyses suggest that mothers socialize their adolescent sons and daughters somewhat differently as a result of the unique contexts their male and female children faced. Daughters reported that their mothers taught them to treat others with the same respect that they wanted to be shown and to be aware of how their public behavior might promote stereotypes. A few mothers encouraged their daughters to affiliate with White peers because they believed that through their associations with White peers, they would be more likely to be exposed to information and learn about academic resources that may better help them to perform well academically.

Discussions in the African American adolescent males' focus groups highlighted similar forms of racial socialization in relation to academic achievement. As a result of their mothers' parenting, males were able to maintain a positive attitude about racial identity and a sense of self-pride, in spite of the challenges they faced in school. Adolescent males reported that they agreed with their mothers' messages, that it is important for them to perform well in school and do their best.

In contrast to female participants, however, adolescent males recalled their mothers telling them that they were going to be watched more in the community by citizens and police officers. Not surprisingly, mothers stated that they constantly worried about the well-being of their sons. In regard to their interactions with the police, it appeared that mothers' cautionary messages to their sons were on point and quite timely for the adolescent period of development when their sons were increasingly away from the family home. Males also noted that their mothers constantly cautioned them about their interactions with friends, especially deviant peers. As some males reported being accused of delinquent acts, of which they were innocent, because of their associates, mothers' concerns appeared to be justified.

Reactive Racial Socialization

When sons shared accounts of being detained by officers and proclaimed their innocence to their mothers, they noted that their mothers were initially skeptical as to whether their sons were telling the truth about their actions. However, as sons accrued and shared more and more of these experiences, mothers realized their sons were being targeted. As a result they became sympathetic and tried to problem solve about such situations with their sons. Two different sons shared their experiences in the following quotes.

> Like I think that like for me, I don't think she understood the first time it happened to me but then she started to understand … Like the first time I got pulled over for something I didn't do, you know, she was like oh, you must've did something but then after that she started—It started happening more so she realized, you know, it wasn't me. Like you say your mom does understand.

> At first, you know what I'm saying, she ain't want to listen, you know what I'm saying. She just going by what the police say, right. So I'm telling her, I said, you got to listen man. I'm telling you the truth. So ever since then man, we been on the same page, you know. When I talk to her—she listens.

In summary, while adolescents reported feeling protected from racism because of their age, they went on to describe many seemingly discriminatory situations that appeared to be due to race. Girls and boys experienced similar forms of racist incidents within the school and social circles. The only participants who did not report discrimination within the schools were those who attended school in a predominantly African American district. Males also encountered police harassment to which females were not subjected. While some responded to discrimination in anger and frustration, others looked at what African Americans as a people have overcome and reported that their self pride was enhanced in knowing that their success had not been handed to them on a platter. Mothers engaged in proactive racial socialization practices, which prepared youth for discrimination, while also fostering a sense of pride. These practices appeared to be related to how youth understood and coped with discriminatory events. Furthermore, mothers responded to the unique contexts of their male children with reactive racial socialization messages about how to comport themselves around the police when they were wrongfully targeted to avoid further persecution.

Discussion

As evidenced by recently publicized hate crimes against African Americans (e.g., a string of copycat noose-hangings stemming from the incident in Jena, Louisiana; Brehm 2007), racism is hardly an anachronism. While racism has been linked to such important adolescent outcomes as poor mental health, violence, and academic achievement across studies (Brody et al. 2006; Wong et al. 2003), the potential mediating influence of intrapersonal factors like racial identity and self-esteem has been relatively understudied. Thus, while research connecting race and adolescent outcomes is becoming abundant, a more in-depth understanding of the mechanisms within African American families that can protect adolescents from potentially marginalizing experiences is greatly needed. This study sought to address this challenge, by examining the implications of racism for youth development, as well as ways in which their families and communities foster resilience by promoting positive intrapersonal mediators. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data provides a multifaceted understanding of risk and protective processes, as well as the potential moderational effect of gender.

Adolescent Experience of Racial Discrimination

The first study's aim was to examine racial discrimination and the effect of race-related experiences on adolescents' self-pride. A major finding of the study was the complexity surrounding adolescents' experiences and understanding of racism. Quantitative estimates of adolescents' experiences with racism were relatively low (Table 2). Moreover, contrary to expectations, adolescent experiences with racism did not influence their self-pride. On the surface, qualitative results echoed this finding as adolescents voiced the perception that racism had little effect on them due to their age, but was more problematic for their mothers and other adults in their communities. However, the low endorsement of racial discrimination events for adolescents appeared to be in contrast to the accounts shared by adolescents within focus groups, which revealed many discriminatory experiences, including a sense of devaluation at school, with peers, and, in the case of males, harassment by the police in their neighborhoods. The mixed-method design permitted insight into important apparent inconsistencies.

Possible explanations for these apparent inconsistencies have substantive and methodological implications. Adolescents participating in the qualitative study voiced their confusion about inequality and actively attempted to interpret these experiences in their social lives. Experiencing and resolving dissonance related to discrimination against one's culture is normative for minority groups and serves as a primary impetus for moving through stages of racial identity development (Vandiver 2001). Thus, one possible explanation is that inconsistencies may simply be expected in a developmental stage where adolescents are attempting to make sense of the world.

Second, it is possible that youth do not perceive their experiences as discrimination because they are not as drastic as the challenges their parents might face (e.g., feeling marginalized in work settings, or being the last hired and first fired in job situations), or the more acute forms of racism that they may hear about in the media (e.g., Jena Six or the Rodney King beating). They, nonetheless, experience racial discrimination in more mundane forms, which may be more damaging due to their regular recurrence (Peters and Massey 1983). That race-related experiences are encountered daily by some young African Americans suggests the need for future studies to consider ways in which both major and everyday discriminatory hassles affect African American families' life experiences, parenting practices, and adjustment for youth.

A third possibility is that the measure, which was used for both parents and adolescents, does not adequately tap into structural indicators of discriminatory events adolescents may experience, specifically those in school and neighborhood contexts. Indeed, items on the instrument overlapped only partially with the adolescents' qualitative reports of discrimination

experiences. A developmentally appropriate measure is needed that reflects a range of discriminatory experiences that may be confronted by African American adolescents, from the mundane and frequent to the extreme and exceptional, within the adolescent contexts of school, peer groups, and neighborhoods (Seaton 2006).

Influences on Adolescent Self-Pride: Racism and Racial Socialization

Supporting Structural Ecosystems Theory (Szapocznik and Coatsworth 1999), quantitative findings indicated that rather than directly influencing adolescent self-pride, the insidiousness of discrimination trickled down to children through parents. Specifically, we found that parents with greater exposure to discrimination and subsequently opportunities to deal with racism were better equipped to endow in their children positive strategies for coping (Hughes 2003). Findings from our qualitative data revealed that experiences of discrimination produced a sense of sadness, confusion, frustration, and anger amongst adolescents, especially for males, who experienced the highest levels of discrimination across school and neighborhood contexts. While a few males reported acting out in response to these events, however, it appeared that by and large, their self-pride was protected.

A major source of protection was their mothers, whom they characterized as a resource to help them problem solve and provide examples of ways to deal with the persistent presence of the police. For example, a most common socialization approach is for parents to role play with their sons on how to respond when stopped by the police, as in the following quote, “My son knows how to take a neutral stance, put hands in the air, and say, ‘Yes sir’, ‘No sir’ (Coard et al. 2004; p. 288). This form of proactive racial socialization prepares children for the possibility of future racial discriminatory encounters with authority figures. In addition, beyond the functional benefit of their mothers’ problems solving, males expressed a sense of tender connection with their mothers who listened to them and sustained their innocence. In this regard, Stevenson and colleagues (1997) have noted the implication of gender specific racial socialization for African American males and females. Future research studies are needed to advance our understanding of how sons and daughters are socialized about race related issues and the differential effects of this socialization on their subsequent responses to racism.

Many adolescents, especially females, reported that the knowledge of what their parents and other adults in their communities had overcome fostered a sense of pride and desire to uphold that tradition. While perceptions of discrimination can result in anger in young African Americans, parents who provide messages which “balance explanations of harsh realities with hopeful messages of opportunity” (Stevenson 1994; p. 193) can foster pride and resilience amongst children. These findings resonate with results from the SEM analyses, which demonstrated for both males and females that an enhanced sense of self reduced the likelihood of succumbing to peer pressure and aggression as a way to deal with problems, as well as increasing academic achievement (Murry et al., in press).

Influences on Adolescent Self-Pride: Parenting Within a Village

In addition to addressing negative contexts like racial discrimination, SET also emphasizes the importance of positive influences on parenting (Szapocznik and Coatsworth 1999). Residents of rural communities, who lack the resources afforded to urban areas, often rely on each other for many forms of support, including collective socialization (Burton and Jarrett 2000). This study demonstrated the importance of relying on the “village” to support child outcomes in both hypothesized and unforeseen ways. As hypothesized, quantitative analyses provided support for SET in that the link between collective socialization and adolescent self-pride was mediated by the support that community involvement provided for parents in their use of involved-vigilant parenting. Unanticipated, however, were the findings from qualitative analyses emphasizing the importance of successful African American community members as

role models for the racial identity development of the girls in the study. It may be useful to expand and combine the concepts of collective socialization and racial socialization to consider how communities come together to provide adaptive messages about race to their resident children. While we know that African American children receive and process messages from countless sources about race, the predominate conceptualization is that parents provide positive messages that counter the negative messages they receive from extrafamilial sources (Stevenson 1994). For example, examinations of neighborhood influences on adolescents have traditionally been limited to the negative impact of social address variables (Duncan 1994). Results of this study suggest the importance of examining community protective processes, specifically, the positive messages that may be conveyed through public celebrations of cultural holidays, African American historical figures integrated into school curriculums, or predominant political figures who are African American. The study of such messages may add significantly to our understanding of how the village protects adolescents in the face of racism.

Gender Differences

While the quantitative analyses revealed no difference by gender, gender differences predominated the qualitative data. Most palpable of these is the extent to which African American males experienced disproportionate levels of discrimination in opportunities to display academic competence, disciplinary experiences in school, and surveillance by the police. Mothers in the qualitative study proved to be key in moderating the negative influence of discrimination, both by proactively teaching children about racism and the strengths of their cultural heritage, as well as reacting to negative events by problem solving with their sons (Hughes 2003). It has been claimed that schools can either be sites for the reproduction of social inequities or for societal change (Dei et al. 1997) and the same has been said for interactions with the police (Fine et al. 2003). Given the extreme challenges discrimination in these contexts posed for African American males, it becomes crucial that schools and law enforcement become primary targets for interventions focused on reducing discrimination, with specific attention to the intersection of race and gender. In the meantime, parents and communities should be recognized and supported in their essential role in protecting children in the face of racism.

In conclusion, results of the two studies triangulated each other, corroborating the importance of messages from parents and communities in creating strong young African Americans, who rise to the challenge of living in the context of discrimination. Parents turned their negative experiences with discrimination turned into positives, in the sense that such experiences fueled parents to instill in children a sense of pride about their rich cultural history and problem solve ways to deal with racism. Adolescents drew on the experiences of their parents and the strength of communities in their active attempts to make sense of the inequalities and injustice they experienced, enabling them to reframe experiences with discrimination as a challenge to overcome.

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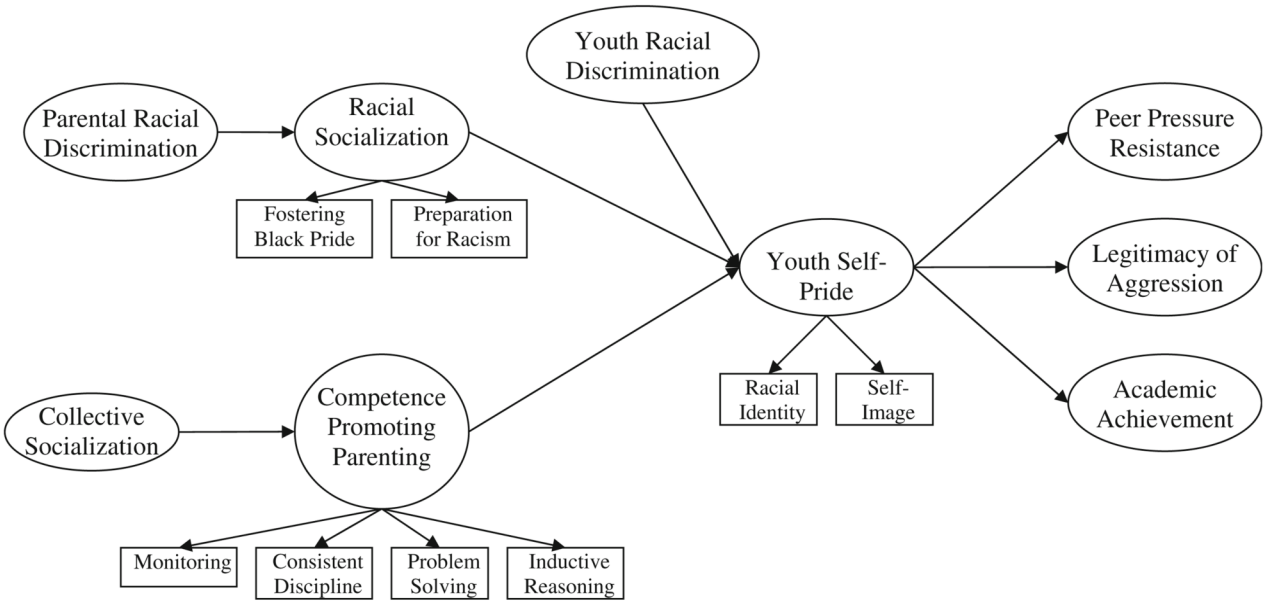

Fig. 1.
Hypothetical model

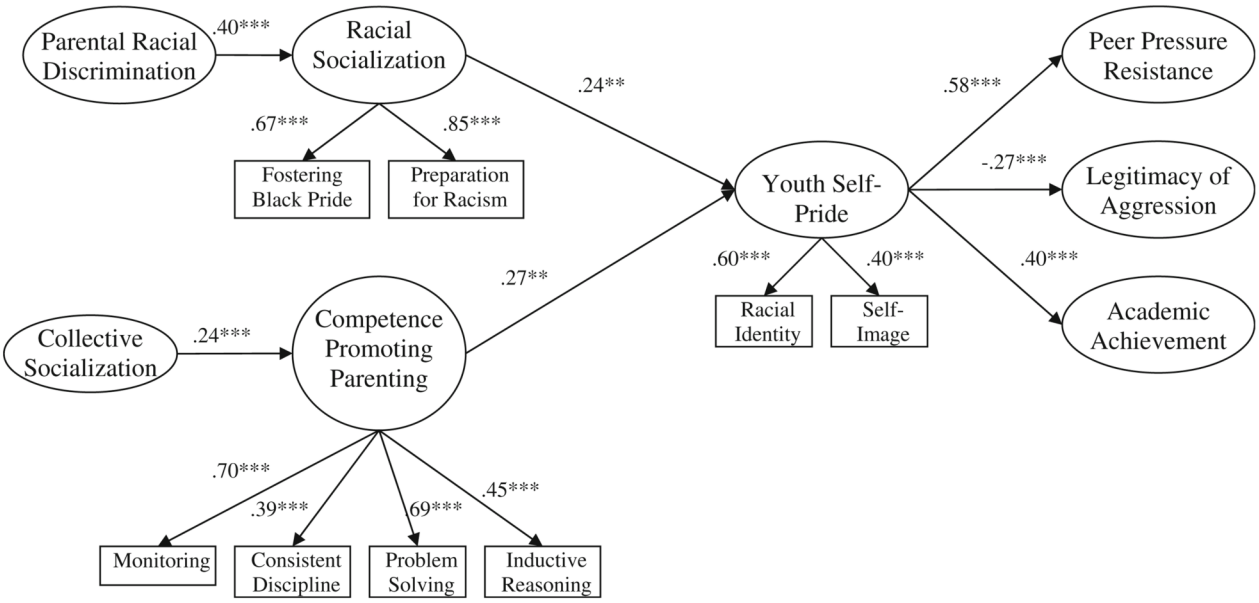

Fig. 2.

Final model. *Notes*: χ^2 (63, N = 373) = 102.40, $p \leq .01$, RMSEA = .04 (.03, .06). ***$p \leq .001$; **$p \leq .01$

Table 1

Characteristics of the quantitative and qualitative samples

Data set	Quantitative sample Family and Community Health Study (FACHS)	Qualitative sample Family processes & the development of competence in rural African American children
Number of families participating	373	31
Adolescent gender (% female)	53	50
Adolescent age (M)	13	13
Primary caregiver to adolescent (% mothers)	87	100
Family structure (% single mothers)	52	100
Primary caregiver age (M)	36	36
Primary caregiver education (% with high school diploma/ GED)	81	57
Annual family income (M)[a]	$29,620	$15,309

[a] Both are below the federal poverty threshold

Table 2

Correlations, means, and standard deviations for all study variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Youth racial discrimination	—													
2. Parent racial discrimination	.21***	—												
3. Promoting Black pride	.10†	.27***	—											
4. Preparation for bias	.13*	.34***	.58***	—										
5. Collective socialization	−.07	−.12*	.12*	.01	—									
6. Parental monitoring	.07	.01	.12*	.02	.22***	—								
7. Consistent discipline	.05	.09†	.10*	.03	.01	.31***	—							
8. Problem solving	−.01	−.07	.09	−.01	.25***	.48***	.26***	—						
9. Inductive reasoning	.03	.04	.12*	.02	.21***	.29***	.17**	.31***	—					
10. Youth racial identity	−.06	.06	.14*	.12*	−.01	.10†	.04	−.01	.09†	—				
11. Youth self image	.12*	.07	.07	.09†	.01	.06	.03	.15**	.17**	.24***	—			
12. Peer pressure resistance	.04	.10†	.13*	.18***	−.02	.17**	.07	.12*	.05	.37***	.18***	—		
13. Legitimacy of aggression	.22***	.03	.06	.03	−.06	−.05	.03	−.06	−.01	−.22***	−.04	−.15**	—	
14. Academic achievement	−.09	.08	.07	.03	.03	.15**	−.07	.11*	.08	.19***	.26***	.21**	−.16**	—
Total	20.3 (6.0)	43.8 (13.0)	13.3 (5.5)	13.3 (5.7)	17.1 (2.6)	17.4 (2.4)	19.2 (2.6)	9.1 (1.8)	15.2 (3.0)	74.6 (6.6)	19.5 (2.5)	27.8 (6.5)	19.1 (3.8)	12.9 (1.9)
Females	20.4 (5.9)	45.6 (14.2)	13.6 (5.6)	13.1 (5.7)	17.1 (2.6)	17.8*** (2.2)	19.3 (2.6)	9.4** (1.7)	15.4 (3.1)	75.2* (6.5)	19.6 (2.4)	28.2 (6.3)	18.8† (3.6)	13.3*** (1.8)
Males	20.1 (6.2)	42.0 (11.6)	13.0 (5.4)	13.5 (5.6)	17.2 (2.7)	16.9 (2.5)	19.1 (2.5)	8.8 (1.8)	15.1 (2.9)	73.8 (6.6)	19.4 (2.6)	27.3 (6.6)	19.5 (4.0)	12.4 (1.8)

*** $p \leq .001$;

** $p \leq .01$;

* $p \leq .05$;

† $p \leq .1$